

U.S. Navy Aids An Anti-Castro Family's Ships

By MERWIN SIGALE

Miami, May 30 — Four Panamanian-flag cargo vessels of the Bahamas Line, owned by an anti-Castro Cuban exile family, are operating in international waters near Cuba under the protection of U.S. warships. The warships are under orders to protect the merchant ships by force against attacks or seizure by the Cuban Navy, high-level sources reported today.

The sources said the orders were issued by the Pentagon in December, and again in February, with a special eye to the Bahamas Line, owner of two cargo vessels seized by Cuban subchasers Dec. 5 and Dec. 15 in international waters, 120 miles northeast of Cuba.

Applies to All Ships

The Pentagon order applies generally to any friendly cargo ship threatened, but, in practice, close surveillance by the U.S. warships is applied only for the Bahamas Line vessels.

It is assumed that the four Bahamas Line vessels now operating, Omar Express, William Express, Jose Express, and Lincoln Express, would be prime targets of Prime Minister Fidel Castro in a crisis.

Castro ordered the takeover of two other ships of the Bahamas Line, the Johnny Express and the Layla Express, claiming that they were serving the Central Intelligence Agency by landing guerrillas and arms in Cuba.

Owner Is Anti-Castro

The Bahamas Line has an office in Miami, headed by Teofilo Babun, whose family is known for its anti-Castro feelings.

Babun said that he did not ask for such protection. "They (U.S. warships) patrol the waters generally, not especially for us," he said.

A Pentagon spokesman also denied "providing protection to any one specific line."

Keep Ships in Sight

But other sources maintained that the U.S. warships, aware of the Bahamas Line schedules, purposely patrolled international waters used by the Bahamas Lines, sometimes keeping those ships in sight for hours.

The patrols operate mainly in the Windward Passage, a 55-mile-wide channel between Cuba and Haiti. Bahamas Line vessels often use the passage on cargo runs between Miami, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

On patrol duty are a 165-foot gunboat from the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and destroyers training at Guantanamo.

STATINTL

U.S. Renews Denials of Any Plans to Attack Cuba

By Marilyn Berger
Washington Post Staff Writer

The State Department yesterday renewed denials that the U. S. government was involved in any plans to attack Cuban territory. This followed a Soviet charge on Monday that Washington was behind "acts of sabotage" against Havana.

The denial by State Department spokesman Charles W. Bray followed a Tass commentary supporting Cuban allegations that the United States was involved in "pirate acts against Cuba" and that two ships seized this month by Havana were owned by persons having connections with the Central Intelligence Agency.

While Cuban exile groups with headquarters in Miami have attempted to stage what have become known as "pinprick attacks" on Cuban shores, U. S. officials said they had no reason to believe that either ship—the Lyla Express seized Dec. 5 or the Johnny Express seized Dec. 15—were engaged in anything but commercial pursuits.

Following the seizure of the Panamanian registered Johnny Express in Bahamian waters, the United States warned Cuba that it would take "all measures under international law" to protect American and other ships against Cuban attacks.

The State Department characterized the Cuban action as a "clear and present threat to the freedom of navigation and international commerce in the Caribbean and a threat to American citizens."

In its commentary Monday, Tass called the naval alert "completely groundless" and charged that the two ships, owned by Cubans who had taken political asylum in the United States, "were widely used by the Central Intelligence Agency . . . for criminal actions" against Cuba.

The ships belong to the Bahama Lines, run by four brothers, who are Cuban exiles and who have been involved in Cuban exile affairs. Tass said that when the vessels were seized, "they had on board armed thugs who were to land on Cuban territory and to stage acts of sabotage."

There is no clear indication why Cuba moved against the two ships now. But informed officials in Washington are inclined to see it as retaliation connected with a recent strafing attack by Cuban exiles on a Cuban fishing village. In that incident, Cuban exiles claimed credit for a landing at Boca de Sama on Cuba's northeast coast on Oct. 12. Two persons were killed and four others injured.

Radio Havana blamed that attack on "the government of the United States and its accomplices." A Cuban exile group headed by Jose Elias de la Torriente claimed responsibility and called it the beginning of a series of actions to overthrow Fidel Castro.

Some U.S. officials also suggested that there might be a connection between the seizures and the current visit to Moscow of Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticos. He arrived there yesterday on what Tass called a "friendship visit."

News of the visit took U.S. officials by surprise. U.S. officials noted that Cuba has frequently used the continuing U.S. threat against the Castro regime as a lever for winning Soviet aid. They noted that the aid agreement between the two countries generally comes up for renegotiation in January and that the Dorticos visit might be preliminary to that negotiation.

State Department officials said the United States tried to discourage exile plans to attack Cuba and noted that the Coast Guard has frequently picked up Cubans on suspected

clandestine expeditions. The officials said it is a violation of his immigration status for an exile to become involved in any political activity.

The action by the Castro government against the two vessels coincided with a move by Peru in the Organization of American States to lift sanctions imposed in 1964 against the Cuban regime. In an informal OAS on Dec. 13, Peru sought to sound out the attitude of other members toward a resolution to let states establish diplomatic, consular, commercial relations with Cuba.

The United States took the position, as enounced by State Department spokesman Robert J. McCloskey on Dec. 16, that "present circumstances do not justify altering the OAS decisions on sanctions since by virtue of its continuing interventionist behavior and its support for revolution, Cuba remains a threat to the peace and security of the hemisphere." In a formal, closed meeting Friday, Peru withdrew its suggestion.

Tass connected efforts by some Latin American countries to improve relations with Cuba to the U.S. naval alert in the Caribbean. "The wide movement for normalization of relations with Cuba that spread in the Western Hemisphere causes extreme irritation in Washington circles," the commentary said. "They refuse to reconcile themselves to the bankruptcy of their policy of isolation of Cuba and now resort to every means to make Latin American countries continue to follow their anti-Cuban course."

Mexico never broke relations with Cuba, and Chile has recently reestablished its ties with the Castro regime. Sources at the OAS suggested that a new effort may be made to lift sanctions against Cuba at the annual meeting in April. State Department officials, while denying any U.S. gov-

ernment connection with the two vessels that were seized, left open the possibility that the ships, and their owners, may at one time have been involved in anti-Castro activities. But they suggested that that may have been in the heyday of Cuban exile activity between 1961 and 1963.

Cuba's official Communist newspaper "Granma" called the denial by the U.S. government of any connection with the seized vessels a "shameful lie" comparable to Washington's original denial of any involvement in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. But State Department officials said the ships are involved in a regular steamship service between Miami, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

They add that according to crew lists supplied by the Bahama Lines there were no Cubans aboard the Johnny Express, except for the captain, Jose Villa, a Cuban-born U.S. citizen, and two Cubans aboard the Lyla Express.

Freighters seized

U.S., Cuba step up Caribbean watch

STATINTL

By James Nelson Goodsell
Latin America correspondent of
The Christian Science Monitor

Havana and Washington stepped up their surveillance of Caribbean waters around Cuba over the weekend in the wake of Cuba's seizure of two United States-based freighters.

The heightening of tension between the two nations, which could lead to some sort of new confrontation, came as the State Department confirmed London reports that a high-level Cuban intelligence officer had defected in London to the United States.

Informants said the defector carried with him information on an alleged new Cuban-backed Latin-American liberation movement. According to one source, the Cubans are eager to set up some sort of headquarters for revolutionary activity in the Chilean capital of Santiago.

The report on the defector, which appeared first in the Daily Telegraph of London, did not mention his name nor would the Department of State give his name.

Precautionary measures

The Department of Defense, meanwhile, announced it had taken "certain precautionary measures" in its continuing surveillance of Cuba, but it refused to amplify. There were indications, however, that the "precautionary measures" included stepped-up, United States military-aircraft-and-ship measures.

For its part, Cuba announced it had put its air and naval units on alert. Moreover, Havana said it would continue to act against ships that allegedly carry on pirating activities against Cuba, the implication being that Havana regards the Panamanian-registered freighter Johnny Expresso, which it seized last Wednesday, as one such ship. The ship was seized in Bahama's waters, 100 miles from Cuba.

The Havana newspaper Granma, official organ of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, headlined a front-page editorial on the issue: "Hypocritical lying and threatening declaration of the Yankee State Department."

Meeting with family

The editorial said the State Department's comments on the capture of the Johnny Expresso and its sister ship, Lylia Express,

President Nixon last Thursday met with the family of José Villa, the Johnny Expresso's captain, and pledged to seek his release. He is a naturalized American of Cuban birth.

Havana earlier had claimed that the Johnny Expresso, like other Miami-based ships manned largely by Cuban exiles, was involved in action against Cuba and was in the service of the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

Just where the current tension between Washington and Havana is leading is hard to tell. But the situation tends to blunt efforts on the part of some people in the United States to seek a rapprochement with Cuba.

Moreover, it comes at a time when the Organization of American States (OAS) is debating a change in its eight-year-old stand, isolating the government of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

Whether the Havana-Washington tension, and now the disclosures of a new Cuban defector, will affect this debate in the OAS is not clear. Those supporting an end to Cuba's OAS-imposed isolation do not appear to have enough votes anyway to swing a change.

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U.S. WARNS CUBA ON SHIP ATTACKS

**Denounces Latest Seizure,
Vows to Take Measures
to Protect Vessels**

By TAD SZULC

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 17—The United States warned Cuba today that it would take "all measures under international law" to protect American and other ships in the Caribbean from any new attacks by the Cubans.

The warning was contained in a denunciation issued by the State Department over Wednesday's strafing and seizure of a Miami-based freighter by a Cuban gunboat, the second such incident this month, and the subsequent announcement last night that Cuba would attack "pirate" ships "no matter the distance from our coasts or the flag."

Robert J. McCloskey, the State Department spokesman who issued today's warning, declined to specify what measures the United States would take.

Orders Reported Issued

But it was authoritatively understood that orders were being issued to naval and air units in the Caribbean to provide armed assistance to any vessel, American or foreign, that might find itself under attack by the Cubans.

The State Department described the Cuban actions as a "clear and present threat to the freedom of navigation and international commerce in the Caribbean and a threat to American citizens."

The captain of the ship seized Wednesday, José Villa, is a naturalized American of Cuban birth.

President Nixon engaged his own prestige in this latest confrontation with Havana when he personally assured the captain's wife, Isabel, that he would do all he could to obtain his release.

Captain Villa, who was wounded, is under detention in Cuba, which has ignored demands by the United States, sent through the Swiss Embassy in Havana, that he be freed.

The captured freighter is the Johnny Express, which flies a Panamanian flag but is based in Miami and is owned by the Bahama Lines in that city. The Bahama Lines, which has six freighters, belongs to four Babun brothers who are Cuban refugees.

The Lylia Express, first of the Babun ships to be attacked, was seized off the coast of Cuba on Dec. 5. The Johnny Express was strafed, rammed and captured near Little Inagua Island in the Bahamas.

Cuba Charges C.I.A. Links

Cuba charged that both ships were engaged in "piracy" and that their owners had connections with the Central Intelligence Agency.

This was denied in Miami by Teófilo Babún, one of the brothers.

In Washington, Mr. McCloskey said, in reply to questions, "I can assure you that these vessels were on innocent passage and in no way were connected to the United States Government."

American officials were not certain why Cuba has apparently chosen this time for new frictions with the United States and has risked the possibility of actual clashes with American forces, if additional ships are attacked in the Caribbean.

But the impression among officials concerned with Cuban affairs was that Havana was inviting tension when it made the statement last night that "the ships that perpetrate acts of piracy against our country will be treated without leniency, no matter the distance from our coasts or the flag or camouflage they use to perpetrate their crimes."

Officials here said that it was this threat that had led directly to the State Department's warning of reprisals.

Boy Returns From Cuba

MIAMI, Fla., Dec. 17 (Reuters)—Robert McKinley Jr., 16 years old, arrived back in Miami today after being detained for more than six weeks in Cuba. He was one of five crewmen taking a fire-damaged schooner to Key West when Cuban gunboats captured them for invading Cuban waters.

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Castro Calls Attack Reprisal for Raids By Exiles on Cuba

By WILLIAM MONTALBANO

Herald Latin America Correspondent

The Cuban government Thursday portrayed its attack on the Miami-based freighter Johnny Express as a direct reprisal for exile raids against the Fidel Castro regime.

The Panamanian-registered Johnny Express, attacked Wednesday near the Bahamian island of Little Inagua, made port Thursday in Cuba's Oriente Province under escort from Cuban naval units.

On Key Biscayne, President Nixon met with the wife and three children of Jose Villa, the freighter's captain, and said the United States would demand Villa's return.

Villa, a Cuban-born naturalized American citizen, and several members of his crew were reported wounded in the attack, which the Cuban government statement acknowledged had occurred in international waters.

In a dramatic account of the attack by radio, Villa said at one point that he was dying. But White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler said Thursday that Villa was alive in Cuba.

Ziegler called the attack on the Johnny Express "deplorable... an unconscionable act... clearly in violation of international practice...."

But U.S. authorities stressed that the incident would be of most immediate concern to the government of Panama, because the Johnny Express was not only registered in Panama but also owned by a Panamanian corporation.

"WE DO HAVE some interest because at least one of the persons aboard, the captain, is an American citizen," said Ziegler. He said the United States was maintaining close contact with the Panamanian Embassy in Washington.

There was no immediate comment from the Panamanian government.

The Bahamas Line, operators of the freighter, said the crew included nine Dominicans, two Haitians and two Spaniards.

In acknowledging the attack, the Cuban government called the Johnny Express a "pirate ship" in the service of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

The statement said: "This ship, like the Lyla Express, which was captured Dec. 5 in the same area, was flying the Panamanian flag to facilitate its activities of transporting arms and men to Cuba."

In a telephone conversation with The Herald, a man at the Cuban Foreign Ministry in Havana confined himself to the government statement. He refused to say where the crewmen were being held, or how many were wounded and what their conditions were.

THERE WAS some speculation that the 1,400-ton Johnny Express had been taken to the port of Baracoa in Oriente. The Lyla Express has been held there since its capture, and the Cuban government has said it would bring criminal charges against at least some of the Lyla Express' 14 crew mem-

"Cuba will not hesitate to act at any distance from our coast where these pirate ships are operating and under whatever flag or camouflage they are carrying out their crimes against our nation," said the Cuban government statement as heard on Radio Havana.

The statement accused the Cuban exile Babun family, operators of the Express vessels, of being "well-known counter revolutionary agents in the service of the U.S. government."

The Cuban statement recalled an exile attack Oct. 12 on the coastal fishing village of Boca de Sama in Oriente, in which several persons were killed and others injured, including a 13-year-old girl whose leg had to be amputated.

"It was one of dozens of similar crimes committed by the imperialistic government of the United States against Cuba," the statement said.

CUBA CHARGED the attackers at Boca de Sama reached the village in a speedboat launched from "a mother ship."

The Cuban statement did not directly link any of the Bahama Line Express vessels to the attack.

Informed U.S. sources here said the "mother ship" at Boca de Sama was a vessel called the Aquarius, owned by the exile organization Cuban Liberation Front, which claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Babun family is prominent among anti-Castro exiles here. At least two members of the family are veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion and once police arrested two Babuns and seized a large quantity of explosives from their shipyard here.

ONE OF the brothers, Teofilo, had a Herald reporter ejected from the Bahamas Line offices Thursday. He said he was angered by an article on the family's background, published Thursday morning.

But he denied, according to United Press International,

the Cuban charges of CIA connections.

The family claimed the attack on the Johnny Express was part of a personal vendetta against the Babuns by Fidel Castro, UPI reported.

THE JOHNNY Express, like the Lyla Express, was en route back to Miami from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, when it was attacked.

The Lyla Express, the Cuban government has charged, landed exile guerrillas in Cuba "from bases located on United States territory" on three occasions in 1968 and 1969.

The crew of the Lyla Express included two Cuban exiles, as well as Colombians, Haitians, Hondurans and Guatemalans.